

West Lafayette Fire Department February 2011

Jeff Richards Congratulations to Firefighter Jeff Richards who has completed twenty years of service with the Fire Department and is looking forward to several more good years.

Carport Fire There was a rather involved dumpster / car / cars and carport fire this month. The first sentence is written that way because it is similar to the way our dispatch information was received that night. Initially the call came in as a trash dumpster on fire. While en route for about one minute information was received that the fire had spread from the dumpster to a car. About one minute after this our first engine arrived on the scene and found five cars on fire and found that flames were about twenty-five feet in the air.

The cars were under a carport which by now was burning. At the fire's peak flames were as high as the nearby two story apartment building and extended lengthwise about fifty feet. The responding firefighters did a good job of controlling the fire and limiting its spread. There was a large pine tree in-between the carport and one of the multiple unit apartment buildings. The fire threatened to ignite the tree which, if it caught fire, could have led to a call-back of off duty firefighters because the apartment building may have caught fire next. Again, the on-duty firefighters did a good job containing the fire and in recognizing that it wanted to spread to the apartments via the pine tree.

Six additional nearby cars were damaged by radiant heat. Our fire trucks were not damaged but had they been positioned too close they would have been. One of the cars had magnesium in it and when water is applied to a magnesium fire it sparks and flares up rather than goes out. Another car had aerosol cans in the truck and they popped and blew up. Tires, shocks and other components also blew up. No gas tanks exploded but gasoline did, however, spill out of the tanks and contribute to the intensity of the fire. Inspector Lancaster said that the dumpsters were plastic rather than metal and that when they melted the burning liquid ran underneath at least one of the cars and that this, combined with the uncontained gasoline, contributed to the high heat intensity and the rapid spread of the fire.

Happy Hollow Park Injury When the snow let up a hiker wanted to get out into the fresh air but, unfortunately, was injured while walking the trails in Happy Hollow Park. The injury was not too bad and by now she may be close to, if not completely recovered. Therefore, the main challenge for the responding firefighters was getting to her with all the necessary equipment and then to get her out. She was about a half mile into the park when the firefighters met up with her and two of her friends. The Police Department off-road vehicle that was recently purchased with grant funds arrived in a timely manner and was utilized to get her and the equipment safely back out to the road.

Chief Drew